DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 391 586 PS 023 761

AUTHOR	Kelly, Clare, Ed.; And Others
TITLE	Parents as Partners.
INSTITUTION	London Univ. (England). Goldsmiths' Coll.
PUB DATE	Sep 95
NOTE	27p.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Collected Works - Conference Proceedings (021)
JOURNAL CIT	Early Childhood Review: Papers from GAEC; n1 Aut 95
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Early Childhood Education; Early Reading; Foreign Countries; Learning Experience; Literacy; *Parent Participation; *Parents as Teachers; *Parent School Relationship; Parent Student Relationship; *Partnerships in Education; Play; Reading Improvement; Writing (Composition); Young Children
IDENTIFIERS	Early Childhood Development Programs; England; Wales

ABSTRACT

This booklet is part of a series of articles, reviews, and conference reports issued by Goldsmiths Association for Early Childhood (GAEC). This issue focuses on parents as partners from the point of view of parents, teachers, and childminders, discussing how the partnership between home and school continues to become a more equal one by cooperative contribution. The articles in this issue are: (1) "The Changing View of Home-School Partnership" (Sue Pidgeon), emphasizing the important role of parents in their children's education; (2) "Childminding--The State of Play" (Charles Rice), dealing with the definition and function of childminding in early childhood education; (3) "Reading and Writing in the Nursery and at Home," discussing parental involvement in a bilingual nursery in South West London; (4) "Children and Their Families," a collection of children's drawings; and (5) "Quality in Diversity," presenting a framework for early learning in England and Wales for children from birth to age 8. The GAEC 1994 conference report offers summaries of the keynote speech, two workshops, and seminars. Two book reviews, of "Read It Together" (Sue Pidgeon) and "First Steps Together: Home School Early Literacy in European Context" (Hennette Dombey and Margaret Meek Spencer, Eds.), are included. (AP)

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Early Childhood Review: Papers from GAEC

no.1 Autumn 1995

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Parents as Partners

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Editorial

Here, at last, is the first issue of the new format, new title, "Early Childhood Review: Papers from GAEC". We have retained the items from the newsletter within it, and hope to provide a balance of articles, reviews, reports on conferences etc.

The focus for this issue is parents as partners. The articles reflect various points of view: parents; teachers; and childminders. The recurring thread running through is how the partnership between home and school continues to become a more equal one, with both sides learning from and appreciating each other's contribution. This is most apparent in work around early literacy, and the degree of interest in this area is reflected in the articles in this issue.

We have also included in this issue an account of the new "Quality in Diversity" Project, based at Goldsmiths under the directorship of Vicky Hurst. This project is working to develop a coherent framework for working with the under eights and includes many groups who are already associated with GAEC.

The role of parents in their child's early education has once again become topical in the government's controversial announcement of the vouchers for nursery scheme. There are real concerns voiced by early years practitioners around issues of quality. Once again we have to stand up and defend the rights of all children to ensure equity and quality in early years education. It is good to see many GAEC members making these points firmly and publicly in the media.

The editorial group of the Early Childhood Review would like to take this opportunity to make a small plea. We are a small group, and we would welcome any GAEC members on to this committee to broaden the expertise and experience we can offer. We would also very much welcome contributions for future issues.

Finally we would like to thank the children of Kilmorie and Broadwater nurseries for the lovely drawings of their families we have used to illustrate this issue.

Clare Kelly
Kathy Maclean
Sue Pidgeon
Kay Stables
Editorial Group

Cover illustration by Ella Taylor-Seymour

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The Changing View of Home-School Partnership

by Sue Pidgeon

One of the most interesting and important changes in education in the last twenty years has been the change in the view of the role of parents. When I started teaching in the early seventies the prevalent view was that the school was the place for learning - and that parents place was confined to the home. I remember clearly starting my teaching career in a school that made this very apparent. It was one of those nineteenth century single storey Infant schools, and in my memory (although this might have got exaggerated by time) on the main door was a sign that said 'No parents past this point without an appointment'. The head teacher would look out of her room and 'tut 'slightly if she saw a parent enter the playground, and she was down the stairs and at the door if they started to come towards the school. We welcomed parents in on Open Day, but we were the teachers and we had the monopoly on teaching. We taught reading using Ladybird and other schemes and we certainly didn't want the books to go home. This was the time when teaching was mysterious and kept inaccessible to parents, and yet they were blamed for their children's lack of progress. We talked about children coming to school with 'no language' (patently untrue because they all had plenty to say in the playground and at home) and criticised parents for teaching their children to write in capitals. At the time I felt there was a contradiction in this approach; I had a child of my own and I knew that she learned a lot at home and that I knew a lot about her. I'd looked around and found a school for her where parents were allowed in, but even then when I asked if she could bring her 'reading book' home to read I was told no, 'because parents might not teach their children correctly.'

It was the Plowden report of 1967 that set the scene for a change of approach. It acknowledged the positive benefits of parental involvement and set out a programme to both welcome parents into school, and to inform them of their children's progress. The focus was mainly on encouraging parents to come and work in schools and classrooms, and this as an indicator of successful parental partnership continues to live on.

The early seventies was also the time that research around literacy made it clear that literacy learning was both active and developmental. As researchers began to study early literacy development it became apparent that children were learning about literacy from their home environment before they came to school, and that parents played an enormous part in supporting their children's literacy development. It was the Haringey project (Tizard et al 1982) that first suggested that involving parents in sharing books with their children at home helped those children make significant progress in reading, progress that outstripped those children who only read in school. As the result of this work a large number of schools started developing home/school reading partnerships, perhaps best exemplified in the Hackney PACT scheme. This was a considerable shift in the view of parental involvement as it acknowledged the importance of the educational partnership between home and school.

Over the subsequent decade this approach was generally accepted and parental support became an integral part of schools' ethos and gained substantial importance particularly in the early years. But, by the mid -eighties the climate of education was changing and parental involvement, like education itself became a high profile political issue. The political climate and associated terminology shifted and parents became 'consumers'. There was much adverse publicity about falling standards and it was assumed that parents were dissatisfied. Finances were redirected away from local authorities to schools to establish schools as quasi businesses, subject to the vagaries of market forces. Consumer's (parent's) choice was seen as the way to improve standards, with the successful schools expanding and the less successful going to the wall. In fact, as Martin Hughes et al (1994) point out, this assumption was not based on hard evidence and the market forces model does not really work in education. Their survey of parents and schools in the South West showed firstly that parents were on the whole very satisfied with their child's school and education and secondly, when evaluating a school they did not just focus on results. Parents took a much wider view of the school because they saw education as part of the child's whole development. It also exploded the myth of parental choice. It was clear from their survey that in reality most parents did not consider that they had a choice as they were constrained and influenced by such as distance accessibility etc.

But for educators it is the other aspect of parental involvement that concerns us most - that which acknowledges the role of home school partnership in supporting learning. Schools have rightly been working to maintain and encourage parental involvement in their pupils' learning. Most often this has been seen in parental support for in reading. More than any other activity reading relies on a substantial amount of one to one work at the early stages and the adult gives crucial support, providing the 'scaffolding' to help the child move along the continuum of dependent to independent reader.

This involvement has been an area of study and research. The findings are somewhat inconclusive, and not all have replicated the kind of improvements in pupils' reading attainment that the Haringey Project saw. This has led to debate around the kind of involvement that is most effective, and how much guidance parents need to provide effective support. As Peter Hannon (1995) points out in his comprehensive study, these need further examination if we are to come to any conclusions. Nevertheless it is quite clear that much literacy is learnt at home and that parents have an important role to play in their children's education, and this is something that elicits general agreement.

If this is the case it is interesting that most of the work around this has been a relatively one sided affair - it has focussed on looking at how parents are carrying out the school views of literacy. We are now at a point to question this. Is this real partnership? What do families do themselves to support childrens learning at home?

There is relatively little case study work on families at home in this country. But there is some interesting work by Denny Taylor in the USA. She has closely observed the literacy practices of some particularly disadvantaged families in inner city USA. What comes strongly through is that despite enormous constraints on their lives, these families are unquestionably committed to providing supportive literacy experiences for their children. These are not supportive because the school 'says so,' but because they perceive these activities as part of literacy learning. What also is clear is that literacy learning is a natural part of development and these children draw and write and read, not

because they are told to but because they want to. The reading, writing and drawing of lists and notices, charts and stories are an integral part of their play and their lives.

Some small scale research I did with families in South East London seems to confirm this view. I wanted to look more closely at the home view of literacy, what experiences parents were giving their children at home. Initially my interest arose out of a particular interest in gender related reading experiences. Over the period of visiting families at home I became more aware of exactly what literacy learning looks like at home. These families were reading to their children, these children were reading with their nans and grans, were taking books to their childminders and to Sunday School. These children were watching TV and videos,talking about them and building up favourites and developing preferences. Children had access to paper and writing materials, to computers and typewriters. This made me question my assumptions about home school partnerships - how much did I really see it as a two way process and how much acknowledgement did I give to what happened at home?

Four key points came out of this work for me. Firstly that all these families had reading materials around - magazines, newspapers, and the television. These were not all families who had had positive literacy experiences as children and several of them maintained that they did not read. But in fact we are such a literacy based society that contact with reading materials, not necessarily books, are part of all our lives. Secondly the parents I spoke to saw supporting their children's learning as a natural part of their role and the children's development. They did not need to take their lead from the school. When I asked when they started to read to their children they all suggested that it was when the child showed an interest in books and that they took their lead form their children.

Thirdly, I became aware of the role of the wider family. It was not just parents involved with children but childminders, grandmothers, uncles and cousins. They were all part of the literacy process and that the view of family rather than parental support seemed a more accurate description. And finally, all families were strongly committed to supporting their children in school, and wanted their children to do well. They were all endeavouring to carry out the schools requests for helping with reading in the way they thought best.

Again like Denny Taylor I was impressed with the level of commitment and support parents gave to their children's learning despite often adverse economic and social circumstances. It made me realise how rarely we have a real idea of what the 'home' side of the home school partnership is. Recording systems like the Primary Learning Record (CLPE) give the opportunity to validate the family's part in their childs education, and we need to build on these. I feel we need to rethink our attitudes, to broaden our acceptance of the range of ways parents and families support children's learning (which may diverge from the schools approach) so that we are able to acknowledge and work with the support children get at home in order to work in full partnership with the homes. Ultimately this is to the children's benefit.

CLPE (1993) Guide to the Primary Learning Record

M. Hughes, F Wikely and T Nash(1994) Parents and Their Schools Blackwell

P Hannon (1995) Literacy, Home and School The Falmer Press

D Taylor, (1983) Family Literacy Heinemann Educational Books

D Taylor and C Dorsey-Gaines (1986) Growing Up Literate Heinemann Educational Books

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Childminding - The State of Play

by Charles Rice

I realised when I was invited to write this short article about childminding that this invitation could not have come at a more opportune moment, as this year is the 'coming of age' for the National Childminding Association (NCMA). Whilst we at the Association are celebrating 18 years of development, it should be noted that childminding is the cornerstone of daycare in Britain, and has been in existence far longer than the Association. Over the years childminding has become increasingly professional, and ever higher standards of quality have been attained. I would like to take this opportunity to write about the state of childminding in Britain today and how things are shaping up for the future.

A professional childminder provides home-based, rather than centre based, care for other people's children. Childminding is Britain's most widespread form of daycare for children under five. As well as providing care and education for preschool children childminders provide a service to school children, before and after school and during the school holidays.

As with other forms of childcare, childminders are required to register with the Local Authority under the Children Act 1989. The registration procedure includes:

- inspection of the childminder's home for health and safety by Social Workers, Environmental Health Officers and the Fire Department
- a police check on the childminder and all adults over the age of sixteen living in the premises
- an assessment of the childminder being a person 'fit' to look after children.

In addition to the legal requirements, many Local Authorities obtain medical references and provide pre- and post registration training. Childminders are the inspected on an annual basis by the Local Authority.

Childminders are registered to care for three children under five including their own, and for three children between the age of five and eight including their own. Furthermore, some Local Authorities will make their own requirements in addition to those contained within the guidance of the Children Act 1989, e.g. a childminder may only care for one child under one year. The Children Act 1989 gave Local Authorities the power to improve quality and to focus upon the welfare of the child as being paramount.

Over the years the National Childminding Association has worked hard to improve the professional status of childminding. It has worked toward enabling childminders to become more business-like in their approach to childcare. The Association offers its members a specifically designed public liability insurance policy - some Local Authorities make it a condition of registration that childminders take out Public Liability insurance. These policies put childminding on the same footing as other childcare services, and thus protection has been extended to cover all children who are cared for by childminders who have this professional approach.

The introduction of contracts between the childminder and the parent has also been instrumental in the promotion of childminding as a professional childcare service. Contracts enable both parties to negotiate a service which is appropriate for each child as well as meeting the requirements of both parent and childminder.

The NCMA has worked closely with Government to negotiate a disregard of a percentage of childminding fees as expenses; this is vitally important to those childminders receiving benefit. Many childminders are either claiming benefit as single parents or in receipt of family credit; in order that their benefits are protected a formula for disregarding a percentage of costs has enabled many childminders to continue in the profession as well as supporting Local Authorities to recruit childminders who would otherwise be delivering a service outside the law.

The Children Act 1989 has gone a long way to encourage the development of higher standards of care and education within the childminding field. The four guiding principles of the Act have been instrumental in underpinning this development. For the first time it is a requirement that all childminders are inspected on an annual basis; this not only ensures that childminders are checked by the Local Authority Inspection Team, but that they receive some support in maintaining standards and developing improved services.

The NCMA has always held the view that childminders are not only care workers but, that as with parents who stay at home to look after their children, they are directly involved in the education of these children. The Association has developed a training manual, 'The Key to Quality', that will enable childminders to recognise the educational input they make to the children they look after as well as enhancing those existing skills.

Increasingly childminders are registering for NVQ in childcare and Education. Many childminders have now successfully completed NVQ level 2 and are now progressing through level 3. The bar to training for childminders at this level is finance; at NCMA we are working with many funding bodies to enable childminders to under NVQ training and assessment.

The development of specific training materials for childminders, including multi-lingual videos, will further promote the status of childminding. It had been perceived that childminders were reluctant to enter into training. Far from it. We receive requests for training on a daily basis. This demand from both our membership and Local Authorities has lead us to develop an NCMA childminder training course which will form part of the underpinning knowledge for NVQ; this will be available to all childminders in due course.

In recent years childminding has been recognised as a positive alternative to the workplace nursery and as such many employer-sponsored networks have been created to support working parents. Networks now exist for such employers as Allied Dunbar plc, Boots, Yellow Pages and East Sussex Education Authority, to name but a few. The attraction of childminding for employers and employees alike is the flexibility of the service. It is a service which can meet the needs of shift workers - childminders do not close the doors at 6.00 p.m. on the dot - far from it. One network comes to mind where childminders care for the children of nursing and medical staff overnight and at week-ends; this network is located in a hospital. Furthermore, when an employer has a diverse workforce who commute to work over a large geographical area, a childminding network is the ideal solution, ending the commuting of children and enabling them to make local community links in preparation for playgroup and school.

We are now seeing childminding as a recognised service for school age children. Whilst childminders have traditionally looked after school children it was not until recently, under the Employment Department Out of School Childcare initiative that we have seen this service formally acknowledged. Networks have been developed for groups of children perceived to have additional needs, thus the first network will be set up in partnership between Bromley MENCAP, SOLOTEC and NCMA as consultants, to support this particular group of children. A specific training programme has been developed for the childminders, using the expertise of MENCAP as well as that of NCMA.

I note that it is difficult to get away from the impact of the Children Act 1989, as again I refer to it, this time in relation to the definition of 'children in need'. In order that Local Authorities meet the requirements of Government in this respect, an increasing number of schemes are being developed using the expertise of childminders to meet the needs of this group of children and their families. This service will enable families to function more effectively and be used as a measure to prevent family breakdown.

Childminding has always been viewed as the 'Cinderella' of childcare, as such, we will continue to work to change this view. The recent 'No Smacking' debate has brought childminding a great deal of support from all the major childcare agencies, Local Authorities and a few members of Parliament. Whilst judgement went against the 'wellbeing' of children whose parents wish their childminders to use physical punishment, we believe that the debate has given childminding a more positive profile. The debate will be on-going, and as this process continues to the status of childminding will improve.

The future looks 'rosie', we are presented with many opportunities to promote our core values and to develop a professional service which will benefit all children and their families. We will continue to dispel the myth that childminders merely mind children but that they are an important factor in a child's life and that they offer a professional service which enhances every child's development.

Charles Rice

Director Training Development and Consultancy - NCMA

By Gary

Reading and Writing in the Nursery and at Home

This article looks at parental involvement in reading and writing in a largely bilingual nursery in South West London. Firstly, a parent writes about it from her point of view - and then the school describes their practice.

At Home

Our daughter, Ella, started Nursery in September 1994 at the age of three-and-a-half. She joined a double unit which takes children full and part-time. Ella has a morning place. We had been invited to visit the class several times at the end of the summer term so she was familiar with the staff and her surroundings.

Ella had attended a playgroup for three mornings a week from the age of two-and-a-half so she was used to being part of a group of children. She settled happily into her new situation.

In September Ella was already very interested in writing and drawing. She was able to write her own name and most of the alphabet in lower case. She enjoyed stories and sharing books with all members of the family. Her older brother, George, (7) is a keen reader. She would often read stories to her toys.

Ella quickly picked up on the way that stories were read to groups of children at school and she would want me to "hold the book like Mrs.Woodfield" when I read to her. She would also imitate the same!

After she had been in school for a few weeks, Ella became absolutely fascinated by the Register and wanted to have her own so that she could play schools. She would spend ages with her register, writing the children's names and filling in the boxes. I discovered that a Register play area had been set up in the class. It was interesting that the play continued at home.

After Christmas the children were able to bring home a reading folder on a daily basis. The reading book was changed once a week, or sometimes more often if Ella asked. Ella was really thrilled to be doing something that she had watched George doing for three years. She was extremely keen to read her book with me or her father. She seemed to focus on print straight away and in a very short time was using initial letters to help decode the print as well as picture and context cues. I was amazed to find that she was pointing with one-to-one correspondence and self-correcting herself within a few weeks of bringing her books home.

Each child has their own plastic zip folder to take their reading books home in and also a message book to write the date, title of their book and any relevant message. I find this to be a really useful way of communicating with the staff, especially if I have been unable to speak to them. Whoever reads with Ella can make a comment in the book. Ella also loves to write her own messages and usually wants to write the book title, date, etc. herself so she is writing regularly with a real purpose.

We are delighted that Ella's Nursery experience has been such a positive one and that she had been encouraged to progress with reading and writing at her own pace. She is enthusiastic about all books and always excited to have a new book in her reading folder which she clearly enjoys sharing with us and the staff at school.

Sian Thompson, Parent

In the Nursery

Now almost at the end of our second year as a double nursery unit, we have looked back and recognised some areas we would like to develop and strengthen. Partnership with parents is one of these - an area laden with lip service and not always much action. Partnership with parents sounds good but how does it really work?

We try to have a relaxed and open relationship with parents. Our Bilingual Assistant - Urdu speaking - is always busy translating, communicating, helping us to establish happy and positive relationships with the bilingual children and parents. When Urdu is not the language spoken, confident bilingual parents willingly help us to communicate with parents and children.

A shared reading scheme has been established and has taken off! The children are enthusiastic and the note book is being used for some positive and relaxed communication between parents and nursery staff.

Fridays are bilingual story days. A parent comes in to read in Gujerati and our Bilingual Assistant reads in Urdu. The bilingual children have responded very positively to this. Some parents have commented that their children talk about Friday's story all weekend!

We recognise that we are at the beginnings of a partnership. To move a step further in this partnership we have decided to send out a questionnaire - translated into Urdu, Gujerati and Tamil. The purpose of the questionnaire is to find out how parents feel about coming into the nursery as active participants on a regular basis.

The response so far has been enormous and positive. Parents are very willing to come along on a chosen day each week, fortnight, or month. They are happy to participate in most activities and some parents have skills they would like to share with us. The major concern parents have is about bringing in younger children, and the only complaints have been about the lateness of the questionnaire - why hadn't this all been organised at the beginning of the year? We wish it had.

Next year's children can only benefit from this growing partnership. Our questionnaires are ready to be handed to the parents in September. Once parents have become established as relaxed and permanent visitors/participants, we would like to move on to establishing more time for individual dialogue with parents.

Combining parents home knowledge of their child with our nursery knowledge of their child is the only real way of learning about and understanding the whole child.

We have also lately been looking at our own attitudes to parents as partners in the education of their children. Questionnaires have been given to all nursery staff. We are examining our own concerns and have been talking about the positive outcome for the children if a real partnership is developed.

The link that joins nursery life with home life, nursery staff with parents, is the children. When asked if they's like their Mums and Dads to come to nursery, there was an overwhelming 'YES!' What would they like their Mums and Dads to do in the nursery? "Play" of course!

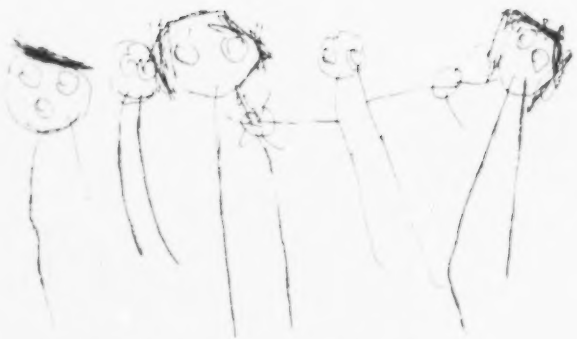
Jenny Woodfield, Nursery Teacher,
Broadwater J.M.School

by Catherine (age 4): daddy, mummy, my brother and me

by Yasmin (age 4): me, mummy, daddy, my autie, baby

by Emma (age 4): my baby brother, my mummy, my daddy, my brother and me

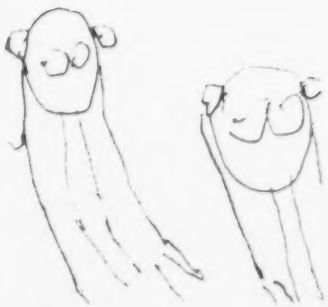
by Samantha (age 3): my nanny, my mummy and me



by Amberley (age 4): daddy, me, mummy, my brother, my friend.

by Farrah (age 4): me, my sister, my grandad, my nanny, my daddy, my mummy

by Joe (age 4): my dad, mummy, me my sister.



by Nathan (age 4): My mum and me.

Quality in Diversity

Establishing an agreed framework for early learning in England and Wales for children from 0-8 years old

This project represents a unique and exciting moment in the history of early childhood education in England and Wales. After many years of working separately the major providers of care and education services for children under the age of eight years have come together under the umbrella of the Early Childhood Education Forum, and have initiated a collaborative project to establish an agreed framework and guidelines for care and education for young children.

The Project is innovative in that it:

- develops understanding of how best to meet children's learning needs in the early years of education;
- seeks a common view of what is an appropriate curriculum for young children;
- involves practitioners from the statutory, voluntary and independent sectors in developing this framework;
- aims to create a continuum of learning for all children from birth to eight;
- hopes to improve practice in providing equality of opportunity for all children;
- will make available its findings in a format that is accessible to practitioners and other adults working with children, parents and inspectors of services.

Who has set up the Project - the organisations involved

The Project is the brainchild of the Early Childhood Education Forum (ECEF), an umbrella group representing the main organisations in England and Wales providing care and education for children under eight. Statutory care and education, private/independent and voluntary services in England and Wales are represented, as well as organisations concerned with equal opportunities: full membership of ECEF will be found at the end of this article.

How we are working - the structure of the Project

We have been meeting together since November 1994 to agree our Framework and to draft our Guidelines. The member organisations of the ECEF have nominated representatives to be working members of the Project. We meet as a whole group, and in three age-phase groups for those working with children 0-3, 3-5, and 5-8. The Guidelines are being drafted by Writing Groups composed of people from each of the age-phase Working Groups, and the drafts are revised and extended regularly by the Working Groups. The Working Groups are in communication about continuity between drafts for the different age-phases.

Timing of the Project's work, November 1994 to March 1996

The age-phase Working Groups meet regularly up to October 1995, while the Writing Groups are meeting informally to prepare drafts and incorporate suggestions form the Working Groups.

The members of the Project Team
The project is directed by Vicky Hurst. The two Project Associates are Marjorie Ouvry and Celia Burgess-Macey.

The Team co-ordinate the age-phase groups as follows:
0-3 group is co-ordinated by Vicky Hurst;
3-5 groups is co-ordinated by Marjorie Ouvry;
5-8 group is co-ordinated by Celia Burgess-Macey.

What kind of educational provision are we planning for?
We believe that all provision of education and care for children under eight should be developmentally appropriate - it should be planned and provided according to individual children's needs for learning and development. If this does not happen children do not get a good start to their education.

....helping adults learn to take account of children's needs...
We hope that our work will spread understanding of the developmentally-appropriate curriculum for education in the early years; we do not wish to write a syllabus to be followed but to encourage adults to reflect on how we can all work towards improving our planning and our practice by taking children's emotional, social, physical, communicative and intellectual needs more seriously.

....learning from parents, too...
Although the writers of the Guidelines are all adults who work with other people's young children, the Project intends to seek the views of parents as well. We are consulting groups of parents about the content and accessibility of the Framework and Guidelines, and hope that they will help us to make what we write helpful and interesting for everyone who has a responsibility for children.

Building up the Framework and developing the Guidelines
The Framework consists of principles which we all agree on. These principles form the basis for the Guidelines which describe ways in which people working with young children can improve their provision for learning.

Our basic principles for education and care in the years before eight are called the Foundations for Early Learning. The Foundations which are given below show our ideas about how children should be helped to develop a wide range of essential understandings, qualities and abilities at the same time as they develop in subject-based knowledge, understanding and skill.

The Foundations express ideas that are at present under discussion in the Project. We hope that in future they will become agreed general principles for education and care for under-8s.

Foundations for Early Learning
Children learn from all the experiences, planned and unplanned that they encounter, and they need adults to plan appropriate learning activities for them.

- **Belonging and connecting:** effective learning involves developing good relationships with other children and with adults, in families, communities and group settings; it involves learning to be a member of child's own linguistic, cultural and community group.

- **Being and becoming:** effective learning builds on self-respect, feelings of personal worth and identity; it includes care of self, health and safety of individual.

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- **Doing and becoming Active:** effective learning builds on what children have already achieved, and the processes of learning are important as they contribute to attitudes to learning and achievement.

- **Contributing and Participating:** effective learning includes learning to be responsible and to make appropriate choices in a group.

- **Thinking understanding and knowing:** in order to learn effectively children build up their own understanding through active processes such as play, discovery and encounters with world knowledge and culture. They work to make and express their own meanings.

The Foundations are the basis of the agreed Framework for Early Learning. The Guidelines for 0-3s, 3-5s, and 5-8s will focus on some of the issues, both overarching ones and those distinctive to particular age-groups, that are important in these areas.

Members of the Early Childhood Education Forum (ECEF) are as follows:

Association for Advisers for Under Eights and their Families (AAUEF)

Association of County Councils (ACC)

Association of Metropolitan Authorities (AMA)

British Association for Early Childhood Education (BAECE)

Campaign for the Advancement of State Education (CASE)

Childcare Association

Children in Wales

Commission for Racial Equality

Council for Disabled Children

Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE)

Day Care Trust

Early Years Education Group (EYCG)

Early Years Trainers Anti-Racist Network (EYTARN)

High/Scope UK

Kids Clubs Network

Montessori Education UK

National Association of Education Inspectors, Advisors and Consultants (NAEIAC)

National Association of Nursery Centres (NANC)

National Association of Nursery and Family Care (NANFC)

National Campaign for Nursery Education (NCNE)

National Children's Bureau

National Childminding Association (NCMA)

National Council of Parent Teacher Associations (NCPTA)

National Early Years Network (NEYN)

National Private Day Nurseries Association (NPDNA)

National Portage Association

National Union of Teachers

Preschool Learning Alliance (PLA)

Tutors of Advanced Courses for Teachers of Young Children (TACTYC)

Working for Childcare

World Organisation for Early Childhood Education (OMEP)

Observers

Department of Health (SSI)

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To receive further information as it becomes available, please send an A5 envelope, stamped and self addressed, to:

Dee Seymour
Secretary
Quality in Diversity Project (Information)
Department of Educational Studies
Goldsmiths University of London
New Cross, London SE14 6NW

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Parents and Early Childhood Education.

Dr. Martin Hughes, the keynote speaker based his speech on his research on the relationship between parents and schools. He began by saying that parents are viewed in a variety of ways. Professionals sometimes see parents as problems and will fit them into two categories; those who are pushy and believe that their own child is superior to all others and those who are largely indifferent and find involvement with school tiresome. A lot of his research has been to look at these views and to decide whether they fit.

Dr. Hughes had found that, irrespective of class, homes are a rich learning environment in which children can engage in rich conversations and activities which are potentially educational. It its therefore important for a partnership to exist between parents and professionals . His main finding is that children are expected to move, without difficulty, between two cultures which may have different expectations, values, games and activities.

He spoke of Sonny Boy, a traveller's child, who came from a background which teachers often see as problematic culture clash. His tradition was predominantly oral and there was a lot of emphasis on 'making sense'. He was very insistent that activities in school should make sense and objected to the lack of real money, taking one's clothes off for P.E lessons as well as the use of blunt scissors,(he was used to using sharp knives at home). Sonny Boy enjoyed storytelling. He would pick up a book and tell his own version of it, bringing in his own experience. He brought with him the tradition that any story could be embroidered and made his own. This was a very clearly articulated example of the difference between two cultures that children may have to face at home.

The context of his current research is around the idea that parents are consumers - customers or clients for whom the school provides a service which they can choose to or not to buy. There is an assumption that many parents are unhappy and see school merely as a vehicle for examination results. The research evidence points to a different picture. When asked, only a minority of parents saw themselves as consumers. Most objected to education being viewed as a commodity but were keen that there should be a partnership between the home and school.

The researchers looked at how parents choose their child's school. The findings of the research group were that a large number, one sixth, had no real choice for a variety of reasons ranging from isolation to over subscription of other schools. About half of the parents interviewed had choice and did not use it, they tended to use the local school. When asked 'what makes a good school?' 51% said that relationships were of paramount importance. The research also showed that most parents were satisfied with their child's school and thought that teachers were doing a good job. However, a large number of parents felt that they were not getting enough information about what their children were and would be learning.

There was a mixed picture of parents views on SATs. Many parents are keen to know how their children are doing at school but would prefer to have information rather than numbers. Parents whose children had taken the SATs felt that the information could be obtained in other ways and recognised that they put extra pressure on the teachers.

Dr. Hughes concluded that there is a contrast between parents opinions of their own child's school and their general opinions on education and this is because of the influence of the media. Parents are providing a rich and valuable environment at home and want to be involved in what their children are doing at school.

Kathy Maclean

WORKSHOP REPORTS - LITERACY & PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Workshop leaders: Brenda Melville and Anne Cooper
Reporter: Kate Magliocco

This workshop followed on from an issue raised in the lecture given by
Martin Hughes - that of the interest and desire of parents to become involved in the education of their child. A brief history of the initial PACT pilot scheme was given. The point was made that the success of this scheme was said to have reassured sceptics of the demonstrated value of the partnership approach to reading. The key issue which was thought to have made these early projects so successful was that of "reciprocity".

It was further suggested that reciprocity is gained through a "true" partnership, shared knowledge and a reliable structure. Shared knowledge is essential as it empowers the parents and increases their confidence in their ability to help educate their child at home. A reliable structure is vital to sustain the dialogue between home and school.

The "Sheffield Early Years Literacy Project" was cited as evidence of the benefits of developing a partnership with parents and of the ways in which empowerment can take place. This project focused on about twenty children between the ages of two and three years of age. All the children had an older sibling at school. The project concentrated on environmental print, early writing and shared books. With book sharing, the aim was to build on what parents were already doing, and to find out about the usage and enjoyment of books in the home. Parents were invited to discuss their observations about their child's early reading skills. It amazed many of the parents that their children were already well on the way to becoming confident, competent readers. In the area of early writing and environmental print it was thought that parents may not be as aware of their role. Parents were encouraged to make books using photographs of the environmental print around their child. It also raised the issue that parents need a lot more information about the nature of early writing and that in particular they may need knowledge and reassurance to recognise the role and importance of squiggles in early writing. Parents came up with many ways in which they thought that they could help their child with in this area such as: pointing out environmental print; pointing out print on packets; acting out stories; choosing and discussing stories with their child; ABC posters on the bedroom wall; alphabet spaghetti and so on.

There is a great focus on children being literate when they come to school. Parents need to be reassured that their child needs to be able to take risks with their early literacy experiences. The "mechanics before meaning" approach is emphasised in much literature which is aimed at parents helping their children become a reader and a writer. As early years educators it is vital that we are able to empower parents with the knowledge that accuracy is not essential in the early stages of writing and reading but that enjoyment and confidence is.

PARENTS AND ASSESSMENT

Workshop leaders: Vicky Hurst

Reporter: Cath Burningham

Impressions of Martin Hughes' presentation

1. Is parental involvement getting parents to do our job for us?
2. Respecting parents - finding out their strengths and weaknesses - how do they want to be involved?
3. Tendency to dismiss those parents who don't come into school/nursery.
4. Making our expectations clear - unspoken rules.
5. Partnership between two skilled bodies
6. Assessment - records at the back of our minds.

How do we measure pupils' progress?

Vicky Hurst outlined an initiative by Berkshire to assist the development of an effective baseline assessment of pupils entering and in the early stages of nursery education.

The process involved interviews with parents, carried out by nursery teachers and assistants. The interview covered the areas of

- Life history
- Relationships
- Stressful experiences
- preschool experiences
- eating
- cultural activities
- development of physical skills and activities language skills special interests

Members of the workshop considered the responses of parents in pairs, each pair taking one of the areas. We did not know the exact questions which were asked in each category or how the parents were prompted to elicit more detail. We felt that many of the responses provided more information about the parents and their own expectations of their children rather than an objective assessment of each pupil. However, we did feel that this provided useful information about each pupil's background and could be used to form a baseline for future individual assessment. We suspected that the fuller answers in each section had been elicited by specific interviews but Vicky Hurst was able to disabuse us of this suggestion.

Generally the group felt that this approach provided useful information but was probably too unwieldy to be user-friendly. Certain information, such as records of routine immunisation, and information about allergies, would be easy to record in a standard way. More subjective information about language development, response to stressful experiences and preschool experience could be better documented by more structured questions and prompts so that they could be recorded in a way that made them more easily accessible for future use. However, it was generally felt that the exercise was a significant way of building bridges into the formal record keeping process and that the next stage is to share the nursery assessment of pupils with parents. The main hurdle which has to be overcome is that of providing time for the individual interviews with parents and effective methods of keeping them involved.

Report on the GAEC Seminar on Thursday 2 March 1995 at 5.30 pm

PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE: RESEARCHING PRACTITIONERS AT WORK WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

by Geva Blenkin

Geva Blenkin is currently directing an extensive early years research project at Goldsmiths' College and her presentation highlighted the main activities of this research and some of its preliminary findings.

Geva explained that the members of the project team are investigating ways in which early learning in group settings can be improved by raising the quality of the practice of those professionals who work with young children. The project aims, firstly, to identify key aspects of professional ability crucial to the quality of the children's early learning and, secondly, to generate guidelines for improving professional practice in the early years. Finally, the project intends to disseminate these guidelines and other findings to practitioners, trainers and policy-makers.

It consists of three main phases, the first of which has involved a national survey in England and Wales in order to ascertain a picture of current provision for the early years, including the qualifications held by those working with young children. Geva pointed out that this became necessary when the project team discovered that no such details existed. She also noted some of the problems they encountered in undertaking the survey. For example, the vast range of titles being used by different boroughs and counties for under-8s provision: over 10 different names are used to represent Local Authority Day Nurseries. This can only create confusion and uncertainty in the minds of parents and educators.

This survey incorporated a representative sample of all educational institutions in England and Wales catering for children under 8. These included both the state maintained, independent and voluntary sectors. The survey has revealed a number of significant findings and the project team is currently involved in an extensive analysis of the data and its implications for early years education.

Some of the preliminary findings reveal interesting information about the qualifications of practitioners working with children under 8. Less than one in five practitioners working with under-8s, for example, has a first degree. Just over a tenth of practitioners have no qualifications at all. Little more than half of practitioners who are working with under-8s were trained as teachers and only a very small proportion of practitioners (less than one in ten) were retrained to work with under-8s. It appears that about two out of three qualified teachers working in the early years have had no specific initial training for working with under-5s. Geva also demonstrated that a very small proportion of qualified teachers (less than one in thirty-five) have undertaken further study for higher degrees.

Geva said that these findings indicate that the majority of practitioners working with young children have not had specialist training for early years. She believes the reasons lie in the lack of importance given to the special nature of early learning and the needs of young children, and a general lack of status for, and a consequent lost of self-esteem in, professionals working within the under 8 age range.

The survey has also revealed that the vast majority of heads of educational institutions consider a knowledge of child development to be of paramount importance for practitioners' professional development. This view was shared by heads of every institution, including those from the independent sector. In contrast, knowledge of school subjects was placed relatively low in the list of factors considered influential in promoting professional development. These are clear messages from practitioners in the field and policy makers should take note.

The project has also collected extensive qualitative data that will reveal practitioner's views of a quality curriculum for young children. Through a series of structured interviews and from narrative responses to the survey questionnaires, the project is hoping to highlight those principles for a quality early years curriculum that are shared by practitioners working in the field.

The project team, however, believe that theoretical principles are not enough to ensure children experience a quality education. The second (and current) phase of the project is therefore concerned with the development of ways in which practitioners can actively improve the quality of their practice and ensure that their principles of good practice are put into effect. The project is investigating the hypothesis that action research is the most effective way of promoting this.

Action research is essentially research undertaken by practitioners into their own practice. In adopting action research, it is believed that practitioners can improve the quality of their practice since the process of action research enables them to deepen their understanding of children's learning, whilst enabling them to develop a more systematic and critically reflective approach to their practice.

A number of boroughs and one county have committed themselves to this process and the project is likely to be facilitating the adoption of action research case studies in over 100 institutions during the second phase. These institutions range from private nurseries and prep schools to nursery, infant and primary schools and include both playgroups, day nurseries and other care centres. Every type of early years practitioner is investigating a whole range of principles of practice and a preliminary analysis of their efforts is confirming the hypothesis that action research is one of the most effective ways for promoting professional development and enhancing the quality of practice. The project has already begun to develop guidelines that will facilitate this process.

Finally, the project is concerned with the process of dissemination and the third phase will involve various disseminating activities that will communicate both the research findings and the guidelines for generating quality practice. These activities are being piloted in the second phase in order to ascertain the most effective ways of doing this.

This project is making a valuable contribution to the issue of quality in early years education, particularly in a climate in which quantity of provision is the predominant concern and not necessarily its quality. Its grass roots approach to research and the way in which it is enabling early years practitioners' voices and actions to be heard and demonstrated is an encouraging and welcome process.

Janet Rose
March 1995

Read it together
Sue Pidgeon CLPE ISBN 1 8 72267 11 4

Both a parent and a teacher review this booklet

This is a booklet for parents and other carers about children learning to read and write. In it five families talk about some of the ways that they help their children at home. The booklet gives practical suggestions and it explains what we know about how children learn to read and write.

Like all CLPE publications, this booklet has an attractive accessible layout. Double page spreads, each featuring a different family, tackle aspects of the subject, explaining the theory in simple terms and give practical activities for parents to implement at home.

These families discuss how they help their children with reading. A range of families have been chosen, bilingual, black, extended, mixed race, nuclear and single parent, who reflect the diversity of households met within our schools. all these families demonstrate, through their comments, their commitment to supporting their children's reading and writing. The photographs show families together sharing books in a relaxed, loving environment. For me, the focus on these families is the thing that makes this booklet so supportive to other parents. The parents show that by being interested in and giving time to their children, they are making a valuable contribution to their children's development as readers and writers. This contribution can be made by all parents. It does not require special qualifications. "Read It Together" also touches upon the extension and development of reading, not just the early stages.

Sue Pidgeon makes the important point that reading and writing are part of the same process. Parents detail a variety of purposes for writing and useful materials. She also touches upon two sources of anxiety for many parents, spelling and handwriting, and highlights a common sense approach to supporting children with these topics. There is also advice on wide range of reading materials, where they may be obtained and also a list of publications and organisations for parents wishing to pursue the topic further.

This sixteen page booklet sets out its aims on the first page and fulfils them clearly and accessibly. However colour photographs and a larger format would make it more appealing but also more expensive. Its clarity and wealth of practical ideas are enabling to all parents. It demystifies the learning to read process and gives parents the confidence and strategies to support their child. In a world with few financial constraints, this would be an ideal booklet to give all families when their child first entered school.
Ann Ross (teacher)

The booklet 'Read It Together' produced by CLPE has a very useful role to play in promoting the idea that parents can and should encourage their children to love books and stories from an early age. It is full of good information and ideas and is small enough not to daunt a busy parent from embarking on reading it themselves in the first place!

The presentation of the information is imaginative in that one is immediately drawn into the personal 'reading experiences' of five completely different families, rather like magazine articles where one is fascinated by the insight into other people's lives and 'how they do it'. Each family story is laid out in the centre of a double page spread in a white box, while on either side there is positive backup information on 'how you can do it'.

I confess that when I first read the booklet I must have skimmed over much of what it said. In fact I thought I had read it very carefully at the time. On going back through it in order to write about it, I realised just how much information there is, and how useful and practical it is. I wonder if it might be helpful in the next edition to put in a paragraph at the beginning, telling them this might happen, to encourage them to look at the booklet regularly, to get the most help from it by browsing through now and again, because much of what it says becomes clearer as one has more experience of sharing books with your children, in the light of what you read in the booklet..... I now feel I'd like to go back to it every few weeks to remind myself and to pick out the next ideas to focus on as my child develops her understanding of letters and words.

If I have a criticism of this excellent booklet, it is that the cover is rather sombre and a bit daunting. This is probably quite unintentional and caused by over dark printing, because the titles are written in a very bold and jolly pink colour over a dark background collage of images. Perhaps it needs to be given to parents by an enthusiastic teacher who could inspire them to read and try some of the simple but exciting ideas. I found that once I had read it, then read a book with my child, then read the booklet again, it was more and more fun to find ways to help her 'into understanding' about reading and writing.

Finally, its tremendous that a booklet of this kind not only encourages the parents, but also gives them 'permission' to help their children to read and write. Not long ago, before reading the booklet, I was boasting to a retired teacher that my 3 year old was beginning to recognise and name a lot of individual letters and that I was experimenting with way to expand this development. I was warned that the child's future teacher might not be pleased about this 'home teaching', told about children who'd learnt 'upper case' at home only to find exclusive use of lower case at school, that I'd be teaching letter names and not phonetics, and so on. This reaction seems quite common and actively discourages parents from helping their children to read. I've found that my child is quite capable of picking up the name and phonetic sound of a letter, and can easily recognise the upper or lower case version, because we presented all of them to her at the same time. We have a scrap book with a letter per page and have gone over and over the letters as we cut out unusual shapes of A or a from magazines, list all our friends, toys or story characters under their appropriate letters - and we drive along trying to think of all the people whose name begins with a particular letter, then we look for objects with that letter, and on and on. She's perfectly happy with all forms of the letters now, and it just took a few weeks of chatting about it. We love recognising shop logos Boots is the favourite) and petrol station symbols. Car logos are also useful. Hopefully this booklet will allow and positively encourage parents and carers to revel in words and visual symbols, to the great enjoyment of their children. I hope teachers actively promote it.

Marianne Taylor-Seymour (parent)

FIRST STEPS TOGETHER; HOME SCHOOL EARLY LITERACY IN EUROPEAN CONTEXT
Edited by Hennetta Dombey and Margaret Meek Spencer (19940 Trentham books/IEDPE £10.95.
ISBN 1 85856 001 2.

This book is the result of a collaboration between European teachers that has arisen through membership of the European Institute for the Development of the Potential of All children (IEDPE) to which GAEC is affiliated. The book documents the work of early years teachers and researchers from a range of European cultures and examines what it means within their own contexts to support young children's literacy development by acknowledging and building upon the diverse social and cultural experiences of the children they teach.

The book is made up of a series of vignettes representing the particular experiences of early years educationalists from Spain, France, Greece and England. However, the overarching theme is that children's literacy learning can be enhanced if parents and teachers have a shared understanding of how children came to make sense of written language and understand what it means to be literate at home and school.

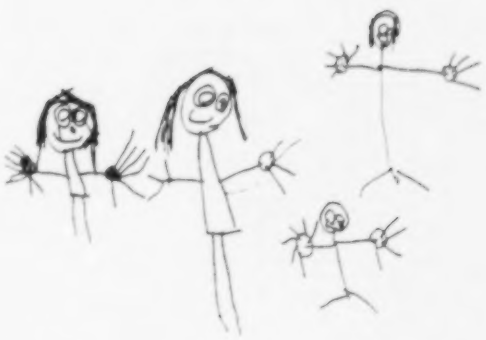
The observations of children and their families reinforce the significant body of work already carried out by such researchers as Hilary Minns in England and Denny Taylor and Shirley Brice Heath in the United States, who have deepened our understanding of family literacy and reminded us of the cultural assumptions that lie behind what children do and the questions they ask.

Reports from Sheffield, Laguna de Duero in Spain and Tower Hamlets in London show the ways in which teachers and researchers are in the process of creating opportunities for opening up a genuine dialogue with parents about early literacy at home and school when misconceptions on both sides can be addressed.

Another chapter arises from the collaborative efforts of two researchers in England and France which examines the common experiences of two children who live in different countries, nether of whom share the language and culture of their schools. The children's experiences show the ways in which their understanding of learning tasks in school are culturally influenced and how teachers can develop their practice in sensitive ways to encompass the families' expectations of school.

A further chapter considers the way in which the Primary Language Record formally acknowledges the complimentary nature of parents and teachers' knowledge and its importance in describing progress and development. The parent conference which is an integral part of the Record, means that parents are invited to come into school to have a discussion with their child's teacher, which is recorded in writing. The authors suggest that the framework of the PLR has been very important in encouraging schools to consider the ways in which they promote partnership with parents.

The final chapter shows how two teachers in Greece invited parents to draw upon their own childhood experiences as a way of encouraging their participation in school. Whilst this may not sound unusual in England it is important to remember that this project was taking place in an educational context where school is traditionally seen as strictly the domain of teachers and children and where the closed and highly structured nature of the curriculum affects daily practice to the point where any innovatory practice becomes almost impossible.



By Rosa

Henrietta Dombey and Margaret Meek Spencer as editors, have drawn the accounts together in a way that emphasises the common themes. All accounts convey a deep respect for the diversity of family literacy practices and an acknowledgment of the need for parents and teachers to become more familiar with what it is that each does to support young children's literacy. The editors also draw attention to the unequal provision for young children across Europe and the book ends with a list of demands that emphasises the rights of young children and their parents and teachers in their roles as teachers and learners.

This book makes clear the will of Early Years educators to continually enhance their understanding of young children's learning and the necessity of continuing to demand quality Early Years education across Europe, for the benefit of all young children and their families.

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